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DOES THE IDEAL HUSBAND EXIST?

BY MRS. MARY A. LIVERMORE.

UNTIL within a few years the world has been ruled by brute force. Everybody has been welcome to whatever he could win and hold by brawn and muscle. There has been little whimpering about it, and the weaker have yielded to the dominion of the stronger, as we, to-day, respect the decision of the courts. The history of woman through these ages is painful reading. Her physical weakness, and not alone her mental inferiority, has made her the subject of man. Toiling patiently for him, asking little for herself and everything for him, cheerfully sharing with him all his perils and hardships, the unappreciated mother of his children, she has been bought and sold, petted or tortured, according to the whim of her brutal owner, the victim everywhere of pillage, lust, war and servitude. And this statement includes all races and peoples of the earth from the date of their historic existence.

Among the Hindoos, woman was the abject slave of man. She was bought, sold, lent, gambled away, and taken for debt, with the power of life and death held over her by some irresponsible husband, father or other man. Throughout the entire Orient her condition has been, and is largely to-day, one of such compulsory servitude that the phrase "Oriental degradation" of woman is the synonym of the lowest and most cruel debasement woman has ever known. Under the old Roman law, the husband was the sole tribunal of the wife. He controlled her person, property, earnings and religion. She was allowed no rights in her children, and could invoke no law against her husband's tyranny and barbarities. The Greek law regarded woman as a child, and held her in everlasting tutelage from her cradle to her gray-

haired old age. Aristotle, and they of his school, called her a "monster," and an "accidental production." The Hebrews pronounced her an "afterthought of the Deity," and "the mother of all evil."

The Councils of the mediæval church forbade the education of women, and declared them "unfit for instruction." And the kind-hearted nuns who defied this decision and established schools for girls, were publicly stoned on the streets. The early Christian fathers denounced women as "noxious animals," "painted temptresses," "necessary evils," "desirable calamities," and "domestic perils." The law proclaimed the wife to be "in all cases, and under all circumstances, her husband's creature, servant and slave," and it maintained this status as rightfully hers from the Heptarchy to the English Reformation. Herbert Spencer in his "*Descriptive Sociology of England*," says: "Our laws are based on the all-sufficiency of man's rights, so that society exists to-day for woman, only as she is in the keeping of some man."

Here and there along the ages there have been exceptional peoples, whose civilization lifted women for a time to an equality with men, and forbade their subordination. Chief among these were the Egyptians. Nevertheless, it is true that woman's subjection to man in the long past has been almost universal and very extreme until a recent period. The hereditary effects of these ages of servitude are very apparent to-day in both men and women.

It has retarded woman's development in normal ways; has broken down her self-respect and self-appreciation. Living under constant restriction and hindrance, she became cowardly, both physically and morally. Denied the rights and privileges common to humanity, she gained them by cunning and fawning, stratagem and intrigue. Eager for her own sake to win the favor of her husband, father, or any other man who held her fate in his hands, she resorted to inordinate efforts to please and cajole him, so that she is to-day overweighted with love of approbation, which sometimes effaces all moral distinctions. It has rarely been possible for women to rise above the arbitrary standards of womanly inferiority persistently set before them. It is amazing that they held their own during these ages of degradation. And as "the inheritance of traits of character is persistent

in proportion to the length of time they have been inherited," women are conservative, and progress slowly with halting step.

The exercise of irresponsible dominion over women has also acted unfavorably upon men, as the use of irresponsible power always does. It has created in their minds immense self-complacency, a contemptuous opinion of women, which runs through the literature and legislation of all nations. It has induced them to formulate different codes of morals for the sexes, more rigorous for women than men, to enact unjust laws for them which disgrace the statute books, to affix severer penalties for crimes committed when women are the criminals, and they have arranged the relations of the government so that while women help to bear its burdens, its benefits are mostly conferred upon men. The husband is given legal control of the wife's person, in most instances he has ownership of her earnings, and except in seven of the States of the Union, he denies her to-day legal ownership in her minor children. The father is their sole legal owner. Rarely do men pay women the same wages, when they do the same work as men, and they allow women to stand on an equality with them only when punishment and the payment of taxes are in question. All these unjust inequalities are survivals of the long ages of servitude through which women have passed, and which have not yet entirely ceased to exist.

"We are wont," says Emerson, "to think that we are at the meridian of civilization. We are only at the cock-crowing and the morning star." Neither men nor women have out-grown the low conditions of society which obtained when the doctrine of male superiority was universally accepted. And we have not yet reached the time when we can boast of the "ideal husband" or the "ideal wife." Now and then one appears, and is immediately recognized as a being of a high and lovely type, more divine than human. In the minds of those who knew the private life of Wendell Phillips, he stands as the ideal husband of his time. The complete unselfishness of his love for his invalid wife—an invalid when she became his wife—made it a joy to him to lift her burdens to his shoulder, and to subordinate his life to hers when occasions required it. Accepting the work to which he seemed pre-ordained, he entered the lists against American slavery, and put into the unequal combat all the forces of his being. Intellect, culture, eloquence, personal magnetism, re-

morseless moral logic, influence, money—all that he had and was were given to the service of the abolition movement. But he always wrought with his heart leaning towards his wife, and her slightest need of him was answered by his presence at her bedside.

“Do not return to Boston to-night!” entreated his friends in a neighboring town, where he had lectured: “the last train has left, and you will be obliged to take a carriage into the city. It is a sleety November night, cold and raw, and you will have twelve miles of rough riding before you get home!”

“But at the end of them I shall find Anne Phillips!” was the lover-like reply, with a sudden illumination of the face.

They told him he was dying, and that the end was very near. “I am ready to go,” was his reply, “and have no preparation to make. But I had hoped to stay with my wife to the end. Who will care for her as I have done?”

“They bore me on a cot into the room where Wendell was dying,” said Mrs. Phillips, “for a last interview. I remember little about it for I was in terrible anguish. But I held myself in strong control, and did not groan, nor moan even, for that would have made it so much harder for poor Wendell to die.”

There have been, and are to-day, husbands of a like rare type, who regard the wife as the “beloved other half,” not in the meaningless sense in which the careless gallantry of the day phrases it, but with the unselfish devotion of a life. They are comparatively few, however, while husbands of another sort are very much in evidence.

My attention was called to three works of art, in a gallery, remarkable alike for their admirable technique, and their unmitigated repulsiveness. One represented in marble, the figure of the drunken god Silenus, astride an ass. The only sober object in the sculpture was the ass, bestrode by the marble god, whose every fibre, muscle and feature drooped in senseless inebriety. Across the gallery was an ivory satyr, with pointed face, short horns, leering eyes, and lolling tongue, the whole expression being one of beastly sensuality. Locked in a glass case to protect it from the curious, was the head of a Bacchante, cut in the pellucid crystal of a gem bluer than God’s heaven, the hair dishevelled, the features distorted, the mouth open, the whole face indicating drunken frenzy.

Given time enough, and these works of art will cease to be. The marble god and the ivory satyr will disintegrate into sand and dust. But the drunken husband and father is also an artist. And he sends out into the world a hideous caricature of the living God in the person of his own child, whose life stretches away farther than our imaginations can follow. It is the most serious and widespread evil of our time, the drunkenness of husbands, alike in high life and low life, and it portends the direst consequences to posterity. The woman who dares marry a libertine, or a drunkard, with the hope of reforming him, or the expectation of finding happiness with him, ought to have a chance in a lunatic asylum or a home for imbeciles.

Before all forms of government, all types of civilization, all advance in education, the relations of the husband and wife make the everlasting granite on which the whole world rests. Just so fast and just so far as these relations are what they ought to be, and what God intends they shall be, just so fast and just so far will society be uplifted—no faster, no farther. “How shall we purify public life?” is the great question of the hour. We can purify public life no faster than we purify the private life in the home, for the public life is only the public expression of the private life of a people. The advance of a nation comes only through the improvement of the homes of a nation. As the aggregate of these may be, so will the nation be. For it is in the home, conducted by the harmonious and right-minded husband and wife that the real harmonizing and civilizing are carried forward.

MARY A. LIVERMORE.